

# *The audience of the Saints' lives of the Katherine group*

Article

Published Version

Millett, B. (1990) The audience of the Saints' lives of the Katherine group. *Reading Medieval Studies*, XVI. pp. 127-156. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84066/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

# The Audience of the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group

Bella Millett

University of Southampton

Between about 1190 and 1210, three Latin Lives of virgin martyrs, Catherine, Margaret, and Juliana, were freely translated into Middle English prose by an anonymous author or authors living in the West Midlands.<sup>1</sup> These translations offer the literary historian something of a problem, since they do not fit easily into the overall pattern of hagiographical writing in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England.

It is unexpected, to begin with, that they should have been written in English at all. During this period, Anglo-Norman was the dominant language in vernacular hagiography. While about a dozen Lives in Anglo-Norman survive from the twelfth century, and over forty from the thirteenth,<sup>2</sup> there is almost no evidence for hagiographical writing in English during the twelfth century,<sup>3</sup> and little more for the first half of the thirteenth. The earliest major collection of saints' lives in Middle English, the *South English Legendary*, was compiled in its original form between about 1270 and 1285,<sup>4</sup> and no more than a handful of Middle English Lives can be dated earlier than this. Although the three West Midlands Lives discussed here survive in early thirteenth-century manuscripts, all the other Middle English Lives are found in manuscripts of 1260 or later, and of these only *Meidan Maregrete*, a stanzaic Life of Margaret, has been dated by its editor as early as the first half of the century.<sup>5</sup>

Still more unexpected, given the date and language of the three Lives, is the comparative sophistication of their style and content. At the time they were written French, as 'an international language of culture',<sup>6</sup> was the preferred medium of vernacular writing, and until the mid-fourteenth century Middle English was to remain a written language of low status, used mainly for the instruction or amusement of those who could not be expected to understand French. The Middle English saints' lives of the

later thirteenth and early fourteenth century seem to reflect the relatively low cultural level of this kind of audience. They are written in various types of rhyming verse, couplet or stanzaic, which at worst could be fairly described as 'rym dogerel', and even at best are usually workmanlike rather than elegant (J.A.W. Bennett speaks of the 'journeyman's *septenarii*' of the *South English Legendary*). As a rule they are fairly short,<sup>7</sup> concentrate on the narrative elements of their material, and make very modest demands on the intellectual resources of their audience. The three Lives discussed here seem to belong to a rather different cultural context. They are written with considerable skill in a highly-worked alliterative and rhythmical prose, are comparatively long, usually retain and even elaborate the lengthy prayers and speeches of their originals, and often adapt difficult material for their audience rather than cutting it altogether.

One factor which must have been a major influence on the form and content of these Lives is their intended audience. As a Belgian scholar has observed, any literary genre will be influenced in its development by the needs of its public, and this applies particularly to the more practical genres like hagiography, 'qui répondent à une nécessité plus ou moins largement ressentie et remplissent dans la vie sociale une sorte de fonction publique et régulière' ('which respond to a necessity more or less generally felt and fulfil a kind of public and regular function in the life of society').<sup>8</sup> We can draw on two different sources for information about the audience of the Lives, the evidence of the surviving manuscripts (including that of the other works they contain) and the internal evidence of the texts themselves; but this evidence itself raises problems, as to some extent the two sources seem to suggest different conclusions.

The Lives have come down to us in three manuscripts. In every case the texts are separated by at least one intermediate manuscript from the original,<sup>9</sup> but all of the manuscripts date from the early thirteenth century, and so are not too far removed from the probable date of composition. The earliest is Bodleian MS Bodley 34, c. 1220-5, which includes all three Lives as well as a letter on virginity, *Hali Meidhad*, and an adaptation of a dialogue on the custody of the soul attributed to St Anselm, *Sawles Warde*. Because the manuscript begins with *Seinte Katerine*, these five works are often collectively described as the 'Katherine Group'. British Library MS Royal 17. A. xxvii, c. 1220-30, includes *Sawles Warde*, *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Margarete*, and a lyrical prose meditation, the *Lofsong of ure Lefdi*. British Library Cotton MS

Titus D. xviii, written towards 1250, includes the guide for recluses *Ancrene Wisse*, *Sawles Warde*, *Hali Meidhad*, another prose meditation, the *Wohunge of ure Lauerd*, and *Seinte Katerine*.

It is unlikely that these manuscript associations are accidental. *Ancrene Wisse*, the Katherine Group, and the four lyrical prose meditations usually linked together as the 'Wooing Group'<sup>10</sup> are closely related not only by manuscript tradition but by theme (all of them are concerned to a greater or lesser extent with virginity, and in particular with the idea of the virgin as bride of Christ), by style (they all owe something to the native tradition of alliterative prose - though the saints' lives are closer to it than the other works - and all are written with considerable skill), and by dialect (all were originally written in the same, very distinctive, literary dialect of West Midlands English).<sup>11</sup> It is clear from internal evidence that at least some of these works, *Hali Meidhad*, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the meditations of the Wooing Group, were written for private reading for women in the religious life, particularly recluses. *Hali Meidhad* is called by the Bodley 34 scribe *Epistel of meidenhad meidene froure*, a letter on virginity for the encouragement of a virgin (or virgins); *Ancrene Wisse* was originally written for three well-born (*gentile*) sisters,<sup>12</sup> and later revised by the author for a larger number of recluses; and in the *Wohunge of ure Lauerd* the imagined speaker is a recluse, 'sperred querfaste wiðinne fowr wahes' ('transfixed within four walls').<sup>13</sup> The presence of the Lives in the same manuscripts suggests that they may have been used for the same purpose, and the probability is reinforced by a passage in *Ancrene Wisse*. The author is describing how the holy man Publius stopped a devil in mid-air by his prayers and held him there for ten days. He asks his audience of recluses, 'Nabbe ge alswa of Ruffin þe deouel, Beliales broðer, in ower Englische boc of Seinte Margarete?' ('Don't you have a similar story about the devil Ruffin, Belial's brother, in your English book about St Margaret?')<sup>14</sup> It seems likely, given the close relationship of this group of texts, that he is referring to the *Seinte Margarete* we have; and if so, the other Lives may have had a similar readership.

Any discussion of this early readership must depend heavily on Eric Dobson's pioneering research into the origins of *Ancrene Wisse* and the works associated with it. Following up a possibility raised by D.S. Brewer, he argued that the composition of *Ancrene Wisse* and the works associated with it could be linked with a single centre, the house of Augustinian canons at Wigmore Abbey in northern Herefordshire, about eight miles from Ludlow.<sup>15</sup> Dobson identified the original 'three sisters'

of *Ancrene Wisse* with the 'sisters' mentioned in a charter of c. 1252 as formerly living in *La Derefaud*, a mile and a quarter from Wigmore, as the beneficiaries of a grant from Roger de Mortimer (d. 1214);<sup>16</sup> but, as Sally Thompson noted in 1984,<sup>17</sup> the charter in fact refers to 'brothers', not 'sisters'. This means that we would have to look elsewhere in the neighbourhood for the three sisters; one possibility is that they formed the original nucleus of the community of women at Limebrook, four miles south of Wigmore, which was first founded about 1190 and seems to have become an Augustinian priory by the mid-thirteenth century. Both the internal evidence of *Ancrene Wisse* and the early textual history of *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group indicate that these works also served the needs of other recluses scattered around the area.<sup>18</sup> It has often been assumed that the audience of the Lives included nuns as well; but there is no clear evidence for a community of nuns in this area at the time that the Lives were written. Dobson dates *Margarete* and *Iulene* provisionally to the turn of the century, and *Katerine* before 1210; at this time the only community of women within twenty-five miles of Wigmore would have been the one at Limebrook.<sup>19</sup> It is possible that, as Dobson argues, the revised version of *Ancrene Wisse* (which he dates to c. 1228) reflects the growth of this community; but its original endowment was too meagre to have supported more than two or three women,<sup>20</sup> and the mentions of the *moniales* of Limebrook in documents of 1221 and 1226 do not prove that it had already been organized as a priory, or even that its members at that stage were nuns rather than recluses.<sup>21</sup> Much of the evidence Dobson cites from the revised version of *Ancrene Wisse* for the early growth of this community is ambiguous; while it clearly indicates that the author was writing for a larger number of women ('twenty now or more'), and that some of them at least were living together in sizeable groups, there is nothing in the text to suggest that any of them had made the transition from solitary to communal life. The key passage in his argument is an addition in the revised version, which he takes as meaning that 'the twenty or more anchoresses, though they did not live in one place, nevertheless constituted a single community under a prioress and subject to the Augustinian Rule'.<sup>22</sup>

Ge beoð þe ancren of Englonð swa feole togederes (twenti nuðe oðer ma - Godd i god ow mutli) þet meast grið is among, meast annesse ant sometreadnesse of anred lif efter a riwle ... for euch is wiðward oþer in an manere of liflade, as þah ge weren an cuent of Lundene ant of Oxnefort,

of Schreobsburi oðer of Chester, þear as alle beoð an wið an imeane manere ant wiðuten singularite ... þis nu þenne þet ge beoð alle as an cuuent is ower hehe fame ... þis is nunan wide cuð, swa þet ower cuuent biginneð to spreaden toward Englondes ende. Ge beoð as þe moder-hus þet heo beoð of istreonet ... [if any among you] ne folheð nawt þe cuuent, ah went ut of þe floc þet is as in a cloistre þet Iesu is heh prior ouer ... Godd turne hire in to floc, wende hire in to cuuent, ant leue ow þe beoð þrin swa halden ow þrin þet Godd þe hehe priur neome ow on ende þeonne up into þe cloistre of heouene.

(you are the recluses of England so many together (twenty now or more - may God increase you in good) that most harmony is among, most unity and agreement of fixed life according to a rule ... for each is turned towards the other in one way of life, as though you were one religious community of London and of Oxford, of Shrewsbury or Chester, where all are united in a common way of life and without singularity ... this now then, that you are all like one community, is your great reputation ... this has now recently become widely known, so that your community begins to spread towards the borders of England. You are like the mother-house that they spring from ... [if any among you] does not follow the community, but leaves the flock, which is as if in a cloister over which Jesus is the high prior ... may God turn her back to the flock, lead her into the community, and grant you who are in it to remain in it so that God, the high prior, may take you up from it at last into the cloister of Heaven.)<sup>23</sup>

But it is more likely that (as Dobson himself earlier believed) the point of the addition is that the women addressed are *not* organised as a priory. They are not nuns but *ancren*, remarkable because even though they do not belong to a religious order,<sup>24</sup> and are scattered across the country, they follow the same rule 'without singularity'; since the passage is an addition to the original work, it is reasonable to assume that the rule they are described as following is not the Augustinian Rule but *Ancrene Wisse* itself. They are not described as a priory, but compared to one ('as though you were one religious community ... like one community ... like the mother-house ... as if in a cloister'). The 'high prior' of their order is God himself; their cloister on earth is not physical but metaphorical, an anticipation of the equally metaphorical 'cloister of Heaven'. If Dobson is right in assuming that this passage is addressed partly to the women at Limebrook, what it suggests is that in the late 1220s they were not yet

organised as a priory, and were probably still living as recluses rather than communally.

To some extent the second category of evidence, the internal evidence of the Lives themselves, seems to point towards the same kind of audience. *Hali Meidhad* tells its readers, 'þench o Seinte Katerine, o Seinte Margarete, Seinte Enneis, Seinte Iulene, Seinte Lucie, ant Seinte Cecille, ant o þe opre hali meidnes in heouene' ('think of St Katherine, of St Margaret, St Agnes, St Juliana, St Lucy, and St Cecilia, and of the other holy virgins in heaven')<sup>25</sup> who suffered martyrdom rather than lose their virginity, and while Margaret and Katherine were by far the most popular subjects for vernacular saints' lives in this period,<sup>26</sup> the overlap between this list of role-models and the three Lives may be significant. All three Lives add material on virginity to their Latin sources,<sup>27</sup> and the opening address of *Seinte Margarete* emphasises its particular relevance to virgins.

But there are also features in the Lives which point towards a rather different type of audience. In two out of the three Lives, the audience is addressed directly. The opening of *Seinte Iulene* both defines its audience and suggests how the work was expected to reach them:

Alle leawede men þe understonden ne mahen Latines ledene, liðeð ant lusteð þe liflade of a meiden þet is of Latin iturnd to Engliche leode.

(All lay-people who cannot understand Latin, listen and pay attention to the life of a virgin which has been translated from Latin into English.)<sup>28</sup>

*Seinte Margarete* opens similarly:

Hercneð, alle þe earen ant herunge habbeð, widewen wið þa iweddede, ant te meidnes nomeliche lusten swiðe georliche hu ha schulen luuien þe liuiende Lauerd ant libben i meidhad, þet him his mihte leouest, swa þet ha moten, þurh þet eadie meiden þe we munneð todei ... þet seli meidnes song singen ... echeliche in heouene.

(Listen, all those who have ears to hear, widows with the married, and virgins especially should listen most earnestly to how they should love the living Lord, and live in virginity, the virtue dearest to him, so that they may, through that blessed maiden we commemorate today ... sing

that blessed virgins' song ... eternally in heaven.)<sup>29</sup>

At the end of *Margarete*, the author again addresses his audience:

Alle þeo þe þis iherd heorteliche habbeð, in ower beoden bliþelucker  
munneð þis meiden.

(All those of you who have heard this gladly, be more willing to  
remember this maiden in your prayers).<sup>30</sup>

The address to the audience in *Iulienne* is obviously an addition by the translator. The status of the addresses in *Margarete* is less clear, since they are more closely linked to the Latin text, but they do not seem to have been carried over mechanically. The Latin source of *Margarete* uses a fictitious narrator, Theotimus, who claims to be Margaret's contemporary and the author of her Passion. The English translator keeps Theotimus's first-person narrative, but does not sustain this persona consistently, shifting occasionally (as he does in both these passages) into the medieval present of the work's delivery. Margaret is the maiden 'we commemorate today'; she is to be remembered by those who 'have heard' the work, not those who will hear it; and the month in which she died '[on] ure ledene - þet is, ald Englis - [is] Efterliðe inempnet, ant Iulium o Latin' ('is called *Efterliþe* in our language - that is, old English - and *Iulium* in Latin').<sup>31</sup> The opening address, with its call for attention to a general audience followed by a special mention of virgins, is based on the Latin;<sup>32</sup> but since the translator seems to be addressing his medieval audience directly at this point, and since elsewhere he adapts the Latin freely for their benefit, it is likely that he retained the original address because he felt that it was equally appropriate for his own audience. The concluding address in *Seinte Margarete* is broadly paralleled in the Latin source,<sup>33</sup> but there is no equivalent in the Latin to its reference to listeners.

These addresses suggest two things. The first is that at least two of the three Lives were intended for a more general audience, not just for women in the religious life. *Seinte Iulienne* is addressed to all laymen; and *Seinte Margarete*, although it singles out virgins, seems to have a much broader audience in mind (it is not absolutely certain, though it has often been assumed,<sup>34</sup> that the author was thinking only of women; *widewen*, *iweddede*, and *meidnes* could all be male as well as female in Early Middle English, and the author - who follows the Latin in



addressing 'all those who have ears to hear' - may be thinking of the marital status of his audience rather than their sex). The second is that they were primarily intended not for readers but for listeners - a conclusion reinforced by their style. This seems to be designed to please the ear and make comprehension easier for a listening audience. They are written in a more or less continuous sequence of two-stress rhythmical phrases, make heavy use of alliteration, and are characteristically more diffuse and tautologous than their Latin sources. These 'oral' stylistic features are more marked in the three Lives than in any of the other works they are associated with (the closest to them stylistically is *Sawles Warde*, which is not addressed to any specific audience, deals with a topic of general interest, and seems to have been adapted from the dialogue form of its Latin original for homiletic purposes).

The evidence we have, then, seems to point to two quite different audiences. The manuscript context of the Lives suggests that they were read privately, by recluses; this hypothesis is supported by the apparent allusion to *Seinte Margarete* in *Ancrene Wisse*, and to some extent by the content of the Lives themselves. But the style of the Lives, and the addresses to the audience in *Margarete* and *Iulienne*, suggest that they were delivered publicly, to a general audience. How are these two types of evidence to be reconciled?

Addresses to a listening audience and other 'oral' characteristics are a standard feature of Early Middle English hagiography; they are found not only in the Katherine Group Lives but (allowing for the differences in technique between alliterative prose and rhyming verse) in the *South English Legendary* and the other miscellaneous saints' lives of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In her seminal article of 1936, 'Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages', Ruth Crosby concluded that features of this kind provided important evidence for the actual context in which medieval works reached their audience: 'That oral delivery of popular literature was the rule rather than the exception in the Middle Ages has been established beyond question by the evidence examined'.<sup>35</sup> But what if the manuscript evidence suggests a different conclusion? The growing volume of research in recent years on medieval English vernacular manuscripts and their owners has drawn attention to the frequent discrepancies between the internal evidence of the texts and what we know from external evidence about their use. Carol Meale, for instance, has used the evidence of the manuscripts of the three Middle English translations (two verse, one prose) of Hue de Rotelande's Anglo-Norman romance *Ipomedon* to challenge 'the assumption that

there is a direct correspondence between the style, content and audience of a given work'; although the two verse translations seem from their style to have been designed for public recitation to a general audience, the surviving manuscripts of all three versions were produced for private readers of the middle and upper classes.<sup>36</sup> This kind of discrepancy has encouraged the view that apparently 'oral' characteristics, such as addresses to listeners, should not necessarily be taken on face value as evidence for the audience of a work. In 1973, Malcolm Parkes suggested that in the later Middle Ages they might be no more than survivals from an earlier, more genuinely 'oral' culture, preserved beyond their natural time-span partly because 'old stylistic habits die hard', partly because of the persistence among an increasingly literate audience of the practice of reading aloud.<sup>37</sup> This was a qualification rather than a rejection of Crosby's view; it applied only to later Middle English works, and assumed that their 'oral' features, however conventional they had become, still had some kind of relationship to actual conditions of performance. Since then, however, what Derek Pearsall described in 1982 as 'the current fashion for asserting the exclusive primacy of extant written texts as evidence for literary activity'<sup>38</sup> has led some scholars to deny 'oral' features any significance at all as indicators of audience. Thorlac Turville-Petre, in his 1977 study of the poetry of the Alliterative Revival, argued that addresses to listeners in the works of the Revival should be discounted as purely conventional:

The 'audience' is created to match the poem, and this audience may be as fictional as the action of the poem itself. A chronicle of war calls for an audience of warriors ... if in reality they are gouty bailiffs - or even students of Middle English - it is not the duty of the poet to remind them of it ... the conventional author-to-audience opening provides no trustworthy evidence about either author or audience. Nor, since it may be an entirely fictional account, does it provide foundation for the popular assumption that poetry was always listened to rather than read in private.<sup>39</sup>

Annie Samson, in a recent article on the audience of the *South English Legendary*,<sup>40</sup> has extended Turville-Petre's scepticism to the 'oral' features found in thirteenth-century literature. She argues that the *Legendary* was intended for the same audience as the early Middle English romances, and therefore (given Peter Coss's conclusions on the audience of the romances)<sup>41</sup> it must have been 'written initially for

regional gentry and perhaps secular clergy, and designed either for individual reading or for reading in the chamber, rather than as entertainment for the hall or public instruction in church' (p. 194). If so, the 'oral' features of its style would have to be discounted, and Samson argues that the evidence they provide for delivery to 'a large communal audience' is 'remarkably tenuous':

It consists of the occasional injunction to its audience to pay attention, and the bidding prayers at the end of each legend, but while these prayers presuppose a community of believers sharing the same practices, there is little about them to suggest a community whose members are necessarily physically present to one another. The prayer at the end of *Katherine* seems to come closer than most to communal prayer:

Ihesu crist for þe suete loue: of seinte Katerine  
 graunti us þe loye of heuene: and schilde us from helle pine.  
 Amen amen, segge we alle: for is holie tyme.  
 (ESEL, 101, lines 302-4)

Such devices are common in medieval literature, part of a convention of writing as though the poet were speaking directly to an audience, a reinforcement, if one likes, of the myth of presence. Seemingly spontaneous direct addresses to an audience define themselves, of course, as illusion within an already written text and are a part of the work's fiction. The creation of fictional audience and situation is a device for governing how the work will be received and is not to be taken as reflecting directly any extra-textual reality. (p. 191)

If we could assume that literary addresses to listeners, even as early as the thirteenth century, need not be taken as anything more than conventional, this would go a long way towards solving the problem of audience raised by the *Katherine Group Lives*. But I am not sure that Samson's argument holds; her distinction between authorial fiction and extra-textual reality seems altogether too absolute. In one sense she is obviously right: addresses to the audience embedded in a literary text belong to the stage of composition rather than performance, and so cannot be seen as *direct* reflections of extra-textual reality. But this does not mean that they have no relationship to it at all. Writers cannot compose their works *in vacuo*; they must have some kind of audience,

however hypothetical, in mind. And if the 'myth of presence' is to be convincingly sustained, there has to be at least an approximate resemblance (allowing perhaps, for flattery) between this audience and the audience addressed within the work; there is no point in addressing solitary readers as if they were a public meeting. If anything, the link between work and audience was closer in the Middle Ages than it is now; medieval conditions of publication meant that medieval authors were more likely than modern ones to be in direct personal contact with their earliest readers or hearers, and the 'myth' of authorial presence might correspond very closely, at least in the initial stages of a work's dissemination, with 'extra-textual reality'.

It is worth remembering that where there is a demonstrable mismatch between the internal evidence of a Middle English text and 'extra-textual reality', it may be the result of historical accident rather than literary convention. Often it can be attributed to a change in audience which has not been reflected in the text itself; a work originally designed for hearers, for instance, might be copied at a later date for private reading without textual alteration. This was particularly likely to happen with verse texts, where the addresses to the audience and other 'oral' features were embedded in the text and could not be removed without wholesale recomposition - which might explain, for instance, why the two Middle English verse translations of *Ipomedon* retained their original 'oral' features even in much later manuscripts produced for private readers.<sup>42</sup> A shift in audience from hearers to readers could take place at any point in a work's history, and if manuscript ownership sometimes suggests a private reader even though the internal evidence of the work points towards an audience of listeners, this is only to be expected. The problem with using manuscripts to establish social context is that by their nature they tell us mainly about the readers of works (whether private readers or readers-aloud), not their hearers. This is particularly a disadvantage for the period before 1300, when books were scarce and expensive, and comparatively few laymen were literate enough to make use of them unaided. Some recent work has skated too easily over the distinction made by Malcolm Parkes, and followed by M.T. Clanchy,<sup>43</sup> between 'pragmatic' literacy (which was widespread among the laity by 1300) and 'cultivated' literacy (which was not); Clanchy's view is that 'knightly culture before the fourteenth century has been largely lost to posterity, as it was primarily oral'.<sup>44</sup> John Frankis's judicious article, 'The Social Context of Vernacular Writing in Thirteenth Century England: the Evidence of the Manuscripts',<sup>45</sup> illustrates well both the

strengths and the limitations of a manuscript-based approach to the period. As he points out, 'it is in the nature of this material that the social context that emerges is almost exclusively clerical' (p. 175). He finds that what the manuscripts offer is 'a picture of the clergy, at that date the literate section of the community, mediating vernacular writings, partly to other clergy and partly to the laity' (p. 184); even MS Digby 86, though probably made for a lay household, is likely to have been compiled by a cleric. The manuscript evidence casts only a dim and fitful light on the social context he is investigating; we learn most about the social group which was least in need of vernacular literature, while its primary audience remains shadowy.

It could be argued, then, that apparent mismatches between 'oral' texts and literate owners do not necessarily imply a corresponding mismatch between the works and their original audience; and there is evidence on the other side to suggest that medieval writers were quite capable of adapting their work to the actual social context of their audience. The fifteenth-century prose translation of *Ipomedon*, for instance, unlike its verse predecessors, 'appears well adapted to the needs of the private voice of the solitary reader, with all inappropriate references to the act of recitation excised'.<sup>46</sup> In the late fourteenth century, the growth of this new reading public for vernacular literature is reflected in an increasing number of addresses to readers as well as hearers;<sup>47</sup> and even earlier vernacular writers might modify their style and modes of address when they expected to be read rather than heard. Although the Katherine Group Lives are cast in a form suitable for public delivery, not all the works associated with them share their 'oral' features. The *Ancrene Wisse*, which as a guide for recluses was destined primarily for solitary reading, addresses its audience in a conversational and intimate style; and within the Katherine Group itself, *Hali Meïðhad* is presented as a letter rather than spoken discourse, and addresses a single (though hypothetical) virgin rather than a group.<sup>48</sup>

On balance, there seems no reason why we should not take addresses to a listening audience and other 'oral' features seriously as evidence for the audience of a work, particularly in the earlier Middle English period. And in the case of the Katherine Group Lives we have some evidence that they were not only intended for public delivery, but (in one case at least) actually delivered. All of the Lives survive in more than one manuscript; as a rule there is little variation between the different texts, but the two manuscript texts of *Seinte Iuliene* are markedly different from each other in wording and length (the Royal text is considerably

shorter than the version in MS Bodley 34). The differences between them are too extensive to be explained by the normal processes of scribal transmission, but too random to be accounted for by deliberate revision; they seem rather to conform to the patterns of variation found in orally transmitted texts. A detailed comparison of the two texts suggests that behind the Royal MS lies a version of *Iuliene* which had been memorized, presumably for more effective public delivery to a large audience.<sup>49</sup>

This leaves us with the problem of relating the two different audiences of the Lives suggested by the evidence. It was, of course, quite possible for a medieval work to reach more than a single audience, or even a single type of audience, particularly if it remained popular over any length of time. The *Ancrene Wisse* itself is a case in point. It was originally written for three sisters of gentle birth; but even the earliest surviving text (in the Cleopatra MS, c. 1225-30), shows signs of modification for a larger number of recluses, and in the Corpus manuscript (c. 1230) we have a version revised by the author for a group of twenty or more. It was very early translated into French, perhaps for a recluse of higher birth than its original audience;<sup>50</sup> by the mid-thirteenth century there had been two separate adaptations for male religious,<sup>51</sup> and from the later thirteenth century onwards versions intended for a more general audience appear. The Trinity French version (c. 1257-74), which includes material from *Ancrene Wisse* in a larger compilation, addresses both men and women, and is designed to be used by lay readers as well as religious;<sup>52</sup> the version preserved in the Pepys MS (c. 1375) is an adaptation with Lollard additions, emphasizing the virtues of the active as well as the contemplative life;<sup>53</sup> and the early fifteenth-century selection in the Royal MS is for a lay audience.<sup>54</sup> Even in its unmodified form, the work found new kinds of audience in the course of the Middle Ages. The Cleopatra MS was presented in the late 1280s to a house of Augustinian canonesses, where it seems to have been well used;<sup>55</sup> another early text, now lost, was translated into Latin before 1315, probably for the spiritual guidance of Cistercian nuns;<sup>56</sup> and there is a good, though late, text in the Vernon MS (c. 1380-1400), which Derek Pearsall sees as an anthology of pious reading for the 'comfortable bourgeoisie'.<sup>57</sup>

But the internal evidence of the Lives suggests something more than the adoption by later readers of works originally designed for a different audience. A medieval work - particularly a work of religious instruction - might well be composed in the first place with more than one audience

in mind. Again, the *Ancrene Wisse* is a case in point. Both the original work and the authorial revision in the Corpus manuscript were addressed to a small, well-defined audience, a group of recluses directly connected with the author. But from the start, the author also envisaged a considerably larger number of potential readers. In a passage addressed to the three sisters who were its first readers, preserved in full only in the Nero MS, he tells them that their relatively comfortable circumstances have protected them against certain temptations, but this is not true of all recluses who might read his work:

Ȝe, mine leoue sustren, beoð þeo ancren þet Ich iknowe þet habbeð  
lest neode to uroure agean þeos temptaciuns, bute one of siclesse ... God  
hit wot, moni oþer wot lutel of þisse eise, auh beoð ful ofte iderued mid  
wone ant mid scheome ant mid teone. In hire hond gif þis cumeð, hit  
mei beon ham uroure.

(You, my dear sisters, have the least need of support against these temptations, apart from illness, of any of the recluses I know ... God knows, many others have little experience of this comfort, but are often afflicted with need, humiliation, and misery. If this comes into their hands, it may give them support).<sup>58</sup>

Here and elsewhere he treats the 'sisters' he addresses as the favoured inner circle of a wider audience of recluses,<sup>59</sup> whose spiritual needs, he courteously implies, may be greater than their own:

Al þet Ich habbe iseid of flesches pinsunge nis nawt for ow, mine  
leoue sustren, þe oðerwile þolieð mare þen Ich walde, ah is for sum þet  
schal rede þis inohreaðe, þe grapeð hire to softe.

(All that I have said about mortification of the flesh is not intended for you, my dear sisters, who sometimes suffer more than I would like, but for some other woman who will perhaps read this, and treats herself too gently).<sup>60</sup>

Part 5 of *Ancrene Wisse*, which deals with Confession, assumes a wider audience still. Although the practical examples given by the author are largely concerned with sins a recluse might commit, he does not confine his illustrations to recluses:

'Sire, Ich am a wummon ant schulde bi rihte beo mare scheomeful to habben ispeken as Ich spec, oðer idon as Ich dude ... Ich am an ancre, a nunne, a wif iweddet, a meiden ... Sire, hit wes wið swuch mon ... munek, preost, oðer clearc ... a weddet mon, a ladles þing, a wummon as Ich am.'

('Sir, I am a woman and should by rights be more ashamed to have spoken as I spoke or done as I did ... I am a recluse, a nun, a married woman, a virgin ... Sir, it was with such and such a man ... a monk, a priest, a clerk ... a married man, an innocent creature, a woman like myself.')

<sup>61</sup>

and the author goes on to say that his examples are selective, and his general instructions apply to both sexes:

Euch efter þet he is segge his totagges, mon as limpeð to him, wummon þet hire rineð; for her nabbe Ich nan iseid bute for te munegin mon oðer wummon of þeo þe to ham falleð þurh þeo þe beoð her iseiðe as on urn.

(Everyone should describe his circumstances according to his position, a man as it is proper for him, a woman as it concerns her; because I have not mentioned any here except to remind a man or a woman of those which are appropriate to them through the ones which have been touched on here in passing).<sup>62</sup>

It is only at the end of Part 5 that he turns his attention back fully to his original audience, in a way which makes it clear how far he has moved from them:

Mine leoue sustren, þis fifte dale, þe is of Schrift, limpeð to alle men iliche; forþi ne wundri ge ow nawt þet Ich toward ow nomeliche nabbe nawt ispeken i þis dale. Habbeð þah to ower bihoue þis lute leaste end

...

(My dear sisters, this fifth part, which is on Confession, is relevant to everybody alike, so do not be surprised that I have not addressed you in particular in this part. But have this short concluding section for your own use ...).<sup>63</sup>

The intended audience of the *Ancrene Wisse* seems to be made up of



concentric circles: at the centre is the primary audience, the original group of recluses, then the other recluses who might also make use of it, and then the still wider circle of general readers assumed in the section on Confession.

If we assume that the Katherine Group Lives, like *Ancrene Wisse*, were written with more than a single group of users in mind, the apparently conflicting evidence for their audience begins to make better sense. However, it does not necessarily follow that the primary audience was the same in both cases. Theodor Wolpers, in his valuable survey *Die Englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters* (Tübingen 1964), sees the Lives as *Predigtlegenden*, legends in sermon form intended primarily 'zum Vortrag vor Lateinunkundigen frommen Frauen' ('for delivery to religious women who knew no Latin') (p. 178), nuns or recluses (p. 177). But he concedes in a footnote that the evidence he cites for this, *Iuliene* 3/5-7, is a passage 'wo allerdings nur Lateinunkundige, nicht ausdrücklich Frauen genannt werden' ('where admittedly only those who know no Latin are mentioned, not expressly women'); and the qualification is an important one. In *Ancrene Wisse*, the only audience which is really significant seems to be the one at the heart of the concentric circles, the particular group of recluses that the author is writing for. He frequently addresses them directly; he apologizes when he mentions matters which are not directly relevant to them; and the work is primarily designed for their use, as he shows by his closing request:

Of þis boc redeð hwen ge beoð eise euche dei leasse oðer mare. Ich hopie þet hit schal beon ow, gef ge hit redeð ofte, swiðe biheue ... elles Ich hefde uuele bitohe mi muchele hwile.

(Read some of this book in your free time every day, whether more or less. I hope that if you read it often it will be of much use to you ... otherwise I would have wasted the long time I spent on it).<sup>64</sup>

As we move outwards from the original recluses, the wider audiences the author envisages seem to become increasingly hypothetical, people who *might* find it useful. If his work comes into the hands of other recluses, it 'may' help them; a woman who should mortify her flesh more than she does may 'perhaps'<sup>65</sup> read it; and there is no indication of the context in which the general audience envisaged in the section on Confession might actually use it. In the Katherine Group Lives, on the

other hand, it is the wider audience which is directly addressed. The style of the Lives, and the textual evidence of *Iulienne* and *Margarete*, suggest public delivery; in *Margarete* the virgins are only a part, though an important part, of the audience addressed, and in *Iulienne* the address is to 'all lay-people'. The choice of virgin martyrs, the additional material on virginity, and the address to virgins in *Seinte Margarete* all suggest that the Lives were written from the start with the special interests of women in religion in mind; but it does not seem, from the evidence of *Margarete* and *Iulienne*, that they were seen as the primary audience.

What can be said about this wider, primary audience? The addresses in the Lives give us no clue to its identity, and here Annie Samson's point about the inevitable gap between a written address to listeners and extra-textual reality has to be borne in mind. The audience as described in the text is not necessarily a specific group of people. All we are told about them is that they do not understand Latin and that some of them may be married. They do not have the sharp definition of the three 'leoue sustren, wummen me leouest' ('dear sisters, the women dearest to me')<sup>66</sup> for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was first written, or the 'twenty or more' addressed in the Corpus revision; they have more in common with the generic, non-individualised *meiden* to whom *Hali Meidhad* is addressed. It is quite possible that the Lives were planned from the start as general-purpose pieces which might be delivered to any lay audience. But even a general-purpose piece is likely to be written with a particular occasion or recipient in mind, and there are other types of evidence, both internal and external, which may help us to say more about the initial audience of the Lives.

My own impression is that at least some of its members were considerably better-educated and more cultivated than the audiences of those other Early Middle English saints' lives which have come down to us; but since the evidence for their audiences is also scanty, and not all scholars agree on its interpretation, the point needs to be argued with some care.

The scholarly consensus that the *South English Legendary* 'was intended for the public instruction of the unlettered laity'<sup>67</sup> has recently been questioned, not only by Annie Samson but by Manfred Görlach, who tentatively suggested that it might originally have been produced for Benedictine nuns.<sup>68</sup> The complexity of its history makes this a particularly difficult question to resolve. We have to treat the *Legendary* less as a single work than (as Paul Zumthor would put it)<sup>69</sup> an *oeuvre mouvante*, a series of *états du texte* whose content, form, and audience

are constantly shifting. It was compiled from a variety of different sources, not necessarily by a single person; and by the beginning of the fourteenth century, the period of the earliest manuscripts that survive to us, it had already begun to undergo the process of revision, rearrangement, and addition which was to continue into the fifteenth century. As a result, we cannot talk confidently of a single 'authorial intention', or of a single audience. We have no information about manuscript ownership before the fifteenth century;<sup>70</sup> all we can do is use the internal evidence of the texts in the earliest manuscripts, which date from the beginning of the fourteenth century, to see what it suggests about their contemporary audience, and to check it for any discrepancies which might indicate a significantly different thirteenth-century audience.<sup>71</sup> What this examination suggests is that there is no strong evidence for an early audience (either in the early fourteenth century or before) of gentry, secular clergy, or nuns, and a substantial amount of evidence against it. Samson's case for an intended audience of gentry and secular clergy is based on two main points: the relatively high intellectual demands made by three of the Lives, *Katherine*, *Michael 3*, and *Thomas à Becket*, and the links of the collection as a whole with the romances. She notes the linking of romance and saints' lives in the prologue of the 'A' redaction, and argues that the predominance of narrative over moral instruction in the *Legendary* and the inclusion of sensational and fairy-tale elements show an attempt to assimilate the two genres and appeal to the audience of romance, the gentry. But *Becket* (which is far longer than any of the other Lives) is untypical of the collection as a whole, and neither the modest amount of theological argument in *Katherine* nor the popular science in *Michael 3* is very demanding. As for the parallels with romance, they indicate only that the *Legendary* was designed to entertain as well as instruct its audience, not that it was written for the gentry. This part of her argument depends on the assumption that the audience of contemporary vernacular romance was confined to the gentry, but the evidence for this is inconclusive; and in any case, a work of moral instruction might be designed to cover a wider social range than a work of entertainment. In fact, the audience suggested by the internal evidence of the *Legendary* does not seem to have been particularly well-educated or gentle. Their cultural level is assumed to be low: references, when cited, are to 'the book' or 'the gospel' rather than to specific authors, and they need to have terms like 'litany' explained to them.<sup>72</sup> The general tone is uncourtly, and sometimes anti-clerical; there are critical references to

corrupt and incompetent priests, archdeacons, and prelates,<sup>73</sup> some hostility to the Normans and the English aristocracy,<sup>74</sup> and a tendency to contrast the rich and noble unfavourably with the poor and simple.<sup>75</sup> The humour is broad and obvious;<sup>76</sup> the style is plain, and on the whole avoids romance themes and conventions (the only exceptions to this are a few uses of the image of the saint as God's knight, which can be read as a reminder of 'the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom' rather than as a homage to secular chivalry).<sup>77</sup> The addresses to the audience are undeferential to the point of being patronising,<sup>78</sup> and seem to assume public delivery to a sizeable audience, not chamber performance or solitary reading.<sup>79</sup> On balance, there seems no reason to abandon the existing consensus on the early audience of the *South English Legendary*; while the *Legendary* may well have appealed to a wide social range, it seems to have been aimed primarily at the lower rather than the upper end of this range.

Some of the other early English Lives are closer to the romances in tone and style, and may have reached a more gentle audience; the tail-rhyme *Eustace* is found in MS Digby 86, which Frankis sees as compiled for an 'upper middle class' (though comparatively 'rustic' and unsophisticated) household (p. 184). But they share many of the popularising features of the *South English Legendary* (which indeed absorbed some of them as it developed), and their addresses to the audience are phrased in very general terms.<sup>80</sup> They give the impression of being more remote than the *Legendary* from the world of clerical learning, and more ready to discard the moral and intellectual content of their sources for the sake of an entertaining narrative. In the Auchinleck *Seynt Katerine*, for instance, Maxentius and his retinue have become black Saracens, worshipping Mahoun and Termagant, and Alexandria has been relocated in Greece; although some of the more dramatic speeches are retained, the debate between Katherine and the fifty scholars is reduced to three stanzas, and the scholars' arguments are not described at all, only refuted by what the audience must take for granted are Katherine's 'resouns, pat wer gode'.<sup>81</sup>

The Katherine Group Lives are separated from these works not only by their much earlier date but by their comparative intellectual sophistication and stylistic elegance. In many ways they have much closer affinities with the contemporary saints' lives in Anglo-Norman. The audience of these lives was relatively cultivated. As Clemence of Barking disapprovingly noted in the introduction to her life of Katherine, it expected its hagiography to be stylistically polished,<sup>82</sup> and

it had a much higher tolerance than the audience of the later English lives for authorial moralisation, lengthy prayers, close argument, and descriptive set-pieces. A comparison of the Katherine Group Lives with their Latin sources shows that they have considerably reduced the intellectual demands of their sources by simplification, greater explicitness, and (particularly in *Katherine*) cutting some of the more difficult material, and have heightened their comic, erotic, and sensational elements. But their approach still remains much closer to the Anglo-Norman hagiography of their time than to the later thirteenth-century English lives. Their modifications to their sources show a good understanding of the Latin, and are carried out with considerable skill. Their style is highly-wrought, rhetorical, and occasionally courtly,<sup>83</sup> and the prayers, speeches, and descriptive passages of their originals are often elaborated in translation rather than cut.

The Lives, however, were written in English rather than French, and this needs some explanation. It cannot simply be put down to their provincial origin; while the native literary tradition weathered the Conquest better in the West Midlands than elsewhere (as the style of the Lives demonstrates), at the time they were composed local writers were still using French for the amusement and instruction of their upper-class patrons. Hue de Rotelande, living near Hereford in the late twelfth century, wrote his romances *Ipomedon* and *Prothesilaus* for Gilbert Fitz-Baderon, lord of Monmouth, in French; and Simund de Freine, a canon of Hereford, translated a Latin Life of St George into French verse at about the same time.<sup>84</sup> It is likely that the Mortimers, the great Marcher lords whose main seat was at Wigmore Castle, a couple of miles from Wigmore Abbey, would have preferred their literature in French; the early thirteenth-century history of the foundation of Wigmore Abbey,<sup>85</sup> which was probably written partly for their benefit, is in Anglo-Norman, and the earliest French translation of *Ancrene Wisse* may have been made for the wife of Hugh of Mortimer, Annora de Braose.<sup>86</sup> It looks also as if at least some of the secondary audience of the Lives, the women in religion, knew French. The author of *Ancrene Wisse* assumes that the recluses he addresses will spend their time partly in 'redunge of Englisc oðer of Frensch' ('reading in English or French'),<sup>87</sup> and towards the end of the thirteenth century the bishop of Hereford, Thomas de Cantilupe, sent a Latin letter to the nuns of Limebrook which they were to ask their confessors to expound to them several times a year 'in lingua Gallica vel Anglica, quam melius noveritis' ('in the French or English tongue, whichever you know

best').<sup>88</sup> But the contemporary evidence also suggests that by 1200, French had become a second language which had to be learnt and, except among the king's immediate entourage, was more a 'language of culture' than a current vernacular.<sup>89</sup> The *Ancrene Wisse* was written primarily for women of gentle birth, but the fact that it was written in English may suggest that they felt more at home in English than in French, perhaps because they belonged to the provincial gentry rather than the more cosmopolitan local aristocracy. It may also suggest that the author was concerned with reaching as wide an audience as possible - a consideration still more relevant in the case of the Katherine Group Lives, which are more directly addressed to a general audience. Simund de Freine's *Life of St George* does not popularise its material to the same extent; it is an elegantly-written piece indulging in self-conscious word-play and clearly intended for a cultivated audience which might include his fellow-clerics. It looks as if the Katherine Group Lives were written for an audience which covered a much wider social range, although (unlike the lives of the *South English Legendary*) they are aimed more at the upper end of this range than its lowest common denominator.

The internal evidence for the intended context of their delivery supports this conclusion. While they are clearly concerned with the entertainment of their audience and (as *Ancrene Wisse* indicates) had readers among the gentry, they seem to have been designed initially for delivery to a congregation in church, not for performance to the more socially restricted audience of hall or chamber. Although *Iuliene* shows a familiarity with the conventions of courtly literature, the Lives on the whole avoid them. They are fairly long, but not too long to serve in the place of a sermon (each of them would take about an hour to deliver). Both *Iuliene* and *Margarete* seem to have been intended for delivery on the saint's day in question; *Margarete* speaks of 'þet eadie meiden þe we munneð todei' ('that blessed maiden we commemorate today'), and there is rather similar, though less conclusive, phrasing in *Iuliene*: 'þeos meiden ant teos martyr þet Ich of munne' ('This maiden and this martyr that I commemorate').<sup>90</sup> The alliterative and rhythmical style that they use has its closest parallels in old English homiletic prose, particularly the rhythmical prose of Ælfric and Wulfstan, and many of their additions to their Latin sources seem to be homiletic (they include lyrical descriptions of the Creation and of heaven;<sup>91</sup> material on temptation, confession, and penance;<sup>92</sup> a warning on the transience of earthly joys;<sup>93</sup> and a speech from the Latin source assimilated more

closely to the outline of sacred history in the Apostles' Creed.)<sup>94</sup>

In the history of twelfth- and thirteenth-century hagiography, the saints' lives of the Katherine Group stand very much on their own. They efficiently popularise and simplify their material for an English-speaking audience, but at the same time they show an intellectual sophistication and a concern for stylistic elegance which are more closely paralleled in Anglo-Norman hagiography than in any of the other English saints' lives of the period. This unique combination may have been influenced by the variety of audiences for which they were intended: the lay congregation (which could have covered a wide social range) to which two of the three Lives are directly addressed, and the comparatively gentle and well-educated women in religion whose needs they also take into account. It is probably misleading to speak of 'the audience' of the Katherine Group Lives; the evidence suggests that they were designed from the beginning to cater for the needs of more than a single audience.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> References for *Seinte Katerine* (SK) and its Latin source will be to the critical texts in *Seinte Katerine*, eds. S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne and E.J. Dobson, EETS s.s. 7 (Oxford 1981); for *Seinte Margarete* (SM) and its Latin source, to *Seinte Marherete, þe Meiden ant Martyr*, ed. Frances M. Mack, EETS o.s. 193 (London 1934); and for *Seinte Iuliene* (SJ) and its Latin source, to the diplomatic texts in *þe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iuliene*, ed. S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne, EETS o.s. 248 (London 1961). The word-division, punctuation, and capitalisation of all quotations have been modernized, abbreviations silently expanded, and emendations supplied where necessary. For the dating, authorship, and general background of these Lives, see E.J. Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrène Wisse* (Oxford 1976), especially pp.154-73.

<sup>2</sup> See the bibliographical survey in Johan Vising, *Anglo-Norman Language and Literature* (London 1923), pp. 42-44 (C12), 53-56 (C13); this should be supplemented by the more recent information in M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford 1963), and in Phyllis Johnson and Brigitte Cazelles, *Le Vain Siècle Guerpir: A Literary Approach to Sainthood through Old French Hagiography of the Twelfth Century*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures 205 (Chapel Hill 1979).

<sup>3</sup> See R.M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (2nd edn., London 1970), ch. 5, 'Saints' Lives'. The only exceptions are the lost English Life



of Wulfstan of Worcester (d. 1095) written by his secretary Coleman (d. 1113), who may also have written other English Lives, and the material from the *Visio Pauli* used in the Middle English prose homily *In Diebus Dominicis* preserved in MS Lambeth 487 (c. 1200), which Joseph Hall (*Selections from Early Middle English 1130-1250* (Oxford 1920), Part 2, p. 413, dated on linguistic grounds to the early C12. The couplet poem on the Eleven Pains of Hell, part Anglo-Norman, part Middle English, which E.G. Stanley assigns tentatively to the late C12 or early C13 ('Die angelnormannischen Verse in dem mittlenglischen Gedicht Die elf Höllenpeinen', *Archiv* 192 (1956), 21-32), also uses *Visio Pauli* material, but the narrator is a soul, not the saint himself.

4 *The Early South-English Legendary or Lives of Saints I: MS. Laud, 108, in the Bodleian Library*, ed. Carl Horstmann, EETS, o.s. 87 (London 1887), gives an early (c. 1300) but incomplete and disordered text; more representative is *The South English Legendary, edited from Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 145 and British Museum MS. Harley 2277, with variants from Bodley MS. Ashmole 43 and British Museum MS. Cotton Julius D. ix* by Charlotte d'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, EETS o.s. 235, 236 (London 1956), 244 (London 1959). Manfred Görlach's *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, New Series 6 (Ilkley 1974), is an impressively comprehensive and detailed study of the development of the *Legendary*. Thomas J. Heffernan, in 'Additional evidence for a more precise date of the "South English Legendary"', *Traditio* 35 (1979), 345-51, pins down the date of the Laud MS prologue (which he thinks belongs to the original work) to either 1276 or 1279.

5 Edited from Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 323 (c. 1270) by Carl Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden: Neue Folge* (Heilbronn, 1881), pp. 489-98.

6 William Rothwell, 'The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 58 (1975-6), 462.

7 The Lives in the *South English Legendary* (eds. d'Evelyn and Mill), can be grouped by length as follows: 0-50 lines: 13; 50-100: 16; 100-150: 9; 150-200: 13; 200-250: 11; 250-300: 5; 300-350: 3; 350-400: 5; 400-450: 1; 450-500: 1; 500-550: 3; 550-600: 1; 600-650: 1; 650-700: 0; 700-750: 2; 750-800: 1; over 800: 1. The heaviest concentration of Lives is at under 300 lines, and numbers fall off sharply above 400 lines; the only Life over 800 lines is *Thomas à Becket* at 2,444 lines. Görlach (*Textual Tradition*, p. 222) notes that Dieter Mehl, who classifies ME romances by length, would have counted all but the two longest Lives as 'short'; even the 734 lines of *Brendan* could be read in about an hour'.

8 Baudouin de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 'L'hagiographe et son public au XIe siècle' (p. 135), in *Miscellanea Historica in honorem Leonis Van der Essen* (Bruxelles 1949), pp. 135-66 (this lucid survey of the possible contexts for which medieval saints' lives might be composed has more general relevance than the chronological limitation of its title might suggest).



- 9 For details, see the editions of the individual Lives cited in n.1 above, and also Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 157-63 and Appendix V, 'The Textual Tradition of *Ste Katerine* and *Sawles Warde*'.
- 10 The other two are the *Lofsong of ure Louerde* and the *Ureisun of ure Louerde*; all are edited by W. Meredith Thompson in *þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd*, EETS o.s. 241 (London 1958).
- 11 See J.R.R. Tolkien, 'Ancrene Wisse and *Hali Meidhad Essays and Studies* 14 (1929), 104-26.
- 12 Nero MS, f. 50r.; see *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe* edited from Cotton Nero A. XIV by Mabel Day, EETS o.s. 225 (London 1952), p.85/23-27.
- 13 Lines 591-93, ed. Thompson, *Wohunge*, p. 36.
- 14 Corpus MS, f. 66a/18-19, in *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Ancrene Wisse*, edited from MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402 by J.R.R. Tolkien, EETS o.s. 249 (London 1962), p. 125.
- 15 Dobson, *Origins*, ch. 3; see also D.S. Brewer, 'Two Notes on the Augustinian and possibly West Midland Origin of the *Ancrene Riwe*', *Notes and Queries* 201 (1956), 232-35.
- 16 See Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 214-25, 238-50.
- 17 See Sally Patricia Thompson, 'English Nunneries: a Study of the Post-Conquest Foundations c. 1095- c. 1250', D.Phil. thesis, University of London, 1984, pp. 75-76. I am grateful to Dr Thompson for allowing me to make use of her thesis, which is shortly to be published in book form by Oxford University Press; and to my colleague, Dr Brian Golding, for the reference and for his general advice on this topic.
- 18 Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 166-69.
- 19 See the Ordnance Survey map, South Sheet, in *Monastic Britain* (Southampton 1978).
- 20 'It is inconceivable that he [Ralph of Lingen] can have intended, with so exiguous an endowment, to found a nunnery. But he may well have intended to provide a basic assured income for a very small community of two or three women ...' (Dobson, *Origins*, p. 233).
- 21 See Thompson, 'English Nunneries', pp. 76-77, and more generally her ch. 2, 'Hermits and anchoresses' (pp. 35-82), on the way in which nunneries could develop from less formally-organized groups of recluses.
- 22 Dobson, *Origins*, p. 270.
- 23 Corpus MS 69a/13-69b/11.
- 24 See particularly Corpus MS, f. 2b/28-4a/17, which emphasises that the recluses addressed do not belong to any established order (and do not need to,

since they are living a solitary life).

25 *Hali Meïðhad* ed. Bella Millett, EETS o.s. 284 (1982), 23/2-4.

26 See Paul Meyer, 'Légendes hagiographiques en français', *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. 33 (Paris 1906), 328-458.

27 Additions to or expansions of the source can be found at *SJ* 13/129-33, 45/476-87; *SM* 4/9-11, 32/4-36/24, 38/28-35; *SK* 551-4, 574; all three Lives also include more minor alterations emphasising the heroine's status as virgin and bride of Christ.

28 *SJ* 3/5-7.

29 *SM* 4/7-14.

30 *SM* 52/36-7.

31 *SM* 52/32-3. The MSS here are corrupt (the reading I give is an emendation), and it is possible that the source of the confusion was a later gloss, 'that is, old English' awkwardly incorporated into the original text. But there is no reason to assume that the explanation itself was not in the original (the Latin 'July' is recorded only once in Middle English before the date of this text, and that is by a monastic chronicler at Peterborough in 1121, on the other side of the country; it is quite possible that the word would have been unfamiliar to at least some members of a lay West Midlands audience of about 1200).

32 As Mack's collation of the 'most easily accessible' texts shows, there is considerable variation among the MSS at this point (Mack, *Seinte Marherete* 128/16-17, and notes), and it is hard to say exactly how closely the English translator is working from his source (in particular, it is uncertain whether it mentioned *widewen* and *iweddede* or not); but he is clearly following its general sense.

33 Mack, *Seinte Marherete*, 142/11-15.

34 Most recently by J.A.W. Bennett, *Middle English Literature*, The Oxford History of English Literature vol. 1, Part 2, ed. and completed by Douglas Gray (Oxford 1986), p. 282.

35 Ruth Crosby, 'Oral Delivery in the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 11 (1936), 110.

36 Carol Meale, 'The Middle English Romance of *Ipomedon*: a late medieval "Mirror" for princes and merchants', *Reading Medieval Studies* 10 (1984), 136-91.

37 Malcolm Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in *The Medieval World*, eds. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (London 1973), p. 572.

38 Pearsall himself did much to set the trend, particularly in his (deservedly) influential *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, Routledge History of English Poetry vol. 1 (London 1977); but, as he later warned, it has to be set in its

historical and intellectual context, 'not only as a natural inclination of scholars who have only books to work with, but also as a temporary reaction against the fantasies of the theorists of oral-formulaic composition' ('The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge 1982), p. 44).

39 Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival* (Cambridge 1977), p. 38 (with sentence-order slightly rearranged).

40 Annie Samson, 'The South English Legendary: Constructing a Context', in *Thirteenth Century England I: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1985*, eds. P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 185-95.

41 P.R. Coss, 'Aspects of Cultural Diffusion in Medieval England', *Past and Present* 108 (1985), 35-79.

42 Both the late C14 tail-rhyme *Ipomadon A* and the early C15 couplet *Ypomedon B* survive in single manuscripts of the later C15; see Meale, 'The ME Romance of Ipomedon'.

43 See Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', and M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London 1979), p. 151-201.

44 *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 198.

45 In *Thirteenth Century England I*, eds. P.R. Coss and S.D. Lloyd, p. 175-84.

46 Meale, 'The ME Romance of Ipomedon', p. 142.

47 See Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival*, p. 39, and Ruth Crosby, 'Chaucer and the Custom of Oral Delivery', *Speculum* 13 (1938), 413-32; Derek Pearsall suggests, though cautiously, that the higher proportion of addresses to the reader in Chaucer and Gower than in Revival poetry may reflect an actual difference in the social context of the poetry ('The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds', p. 50-51).

48 E.g. *HM* 19/26-7.

49 The case for this is argued fully in Bella Millett, 'The Textual Transmission of *Seinte Iulienne*', forthcoming in *Medium Aevum*.

50 The Vitellius French version; see Dobson, *Origins*, p. 299-311.

51 The rearranged extracts in the Gonville and Caius MS were probably intended for an individual religious (see Dobson, *Origins*, p. 296); and *eta*, the lost ancestor of the 'Titus group' of MSS, was sporadically adapted for the use of a male community (ib. p. 295-96).

52 See *The French Text of the Ancrène Riwele, edited from Trinity College Cambridge MS. R. 14.7 ...*, by W.H. Trethewey, EETS o.s. 240 (London 1958), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

53 See Eric Colledge, 'The Recluse. A Lollard interpolated version of the

*Ancren Riwele*, RES 15 (1939), 1-15, 129-45, especially p. 11, 131.

54 See *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwele, edited from British Museum MS Royal 8 C.1* by A.C. Baugh, EETS o.s. 232 (London 1956), pp. ix-xi.

55 See *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwele, edited from B.M. Cotton MS. Cleopatra C. vi* by E.J. Dobson, EETS o.s. 267 (London 1972), pp. xxv-xxix, clxxii.

56 Ibid, p. clxxi.

57 *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p. 143.

58 *Nero MS*, ed. Day f.50r., p. 85/8-19); on the later history of this passage, see Dobson, *Cleopatra MS*, pp. 144-45, f. 81 n. 3.

59 'Understondeð ..., mine leoue sustren, þet Ich write of anlich lif forte frouin ancren, ant ow ouer alle' ('Understand ..., my dear sisters, that I am writing about the solitary life to give support to recluses, and you above all') (*Corpus MS*, f. 41b/22-4); see also f. 111a/15-19.

60 *Corpus MS*, f. 102b/13-16; see also f. 13a/15-20.

61 *Corpus MS*, f. 86b/8-17.

62 *Corpus MS*, f. 87a/18-22.

63 *Corpus MS*, f. 93a/2-6.

64 *Corpus MS*, f. 117a/27-117b/3.

65 M.B. Salu, *The Ancrene Riwele* (London 1955), translates *sum þet schal rede þis inohreaðe* (*Corpus MS*, f. 102b/15) as 'some who are quite likely to read this', but her rendering of *inohrea+e* is probably too emphatic. This compound, although it is normally (even in the *Middle English Dictionary*) understood as the sum of its parts, 'readily enough', is regularly translated in the Vitellius French version of *Ancrene Wisse* (which was made very early, and shows a good knowledge of its dialect) as *paraventure* 'perhaps', a meaning which fits its use in this group of texts much better.

66 *Corpus MS*, f/ 31b/15-16.

67 Charlotte d'Evelyn, in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, ed. J. Burke Severs, Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 2 (New Haven, 1970), p. 416.

68 Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 47-48 (though he takes full account of the possible objections to this view, and proposes it only for 'the liturgical layer of short legends' in the *Legendary*).

69 *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris 1972), p. 72.

70 See Görlach, *Textual Tradition*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>71</sup> I shall be citing evidence from the two EETS editions given in note 5 above (cited as *ESEL* and *SEL*), *ESEL* represents one redaction (L) of the original, *SEL* another (A). Where only one edition is mentioned in the reference, the saint's life concerned does not appear in the other; 'not in *SEL/ESEL*' means that the life is in the edition specified, but the lines cited are not. Line-references are to the first edition mentioned. While material which occurs in both redactions is more likely on balance to go back to the earliest stages of the work, the complexity of the textual history of the *Legendary* means that generalization is dangerous, and Görlach's *Textual Tradition* should be consulted for full details of the distribution of particular lines in the manuscript tradition as a whole.

<sup>72</sup> *Rogationtide* 1-2 (*SEL*); 'simony' is explained in *St Edmund of Canterbury* 151-4 (*ESEL*; also some *SEL MSS*).

<sup>73</sup> *All Souls* 49-56, 344-9 (*SEL*; also *ESEL*), *St Edmund of Canterbury* 153-4 (*ESEL*, some *SEL*), 330-2 (*SEL*; also *ESEL*), *St Thomas à Becket* 174 (*SEL*; also *ESEL*).

<sup>74</sup> *St Wulfstan* 57-80 (*SEL*; also *ESEL*).

<sup>75</sup> *St Edward the Elder* 119-26 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*), *St Brendan* 566-70 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*), *St Edmund of Canterbury* 465-88 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*).

<sup>76</sup> *St Swithun* 69-70 (*SEL*), *St Bartholomew* 182-3 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*), *St Michael* 67-8, 175 (*SEL*; also *ESEL*); *The Eleven Thousand Virgins* 57-8 (*SEL*, not in *ESEL*), *St Lucy* 133-6 (*SEL*, not *ESEL*).

<sup>77</sup> The *Prologue* to *SEL* ('A' redaction), *St Augustine of Canterbury* 39-46 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*), *St Thomas à Becket* 953-62 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*), *Ypolit* 54-6 (*ESEL*).

<sup>78</sup> *Eleven Thousand Virgins* 57-8 (*SEL*, not in *ESEL*), *All Souls* 190-1 (*SEL*, sim. *ESEL*), *St Edmund of Canterbury* 97-100 (*SEL*, sim. *ESEL*), *St Andrew* 213-4 (*SEL*, also *ESEL*).

<sup>79</sup> The line that Samson cites from *St Katherine* (line 304 in *ESEL*) is certainly not strong evidence in itself for the audience of the *Legendary* in general; it occurs only in MS Laud 108, and is tagged on to the final couplet of the Life (which rhymes *Katerine* / *pine*). But there are similar addresses to a listening audience elsewhere in the texts of the *Legendary*: *St Patrick* 709-16 ('Wanne ge habbeþ nou al ihurd ... Betep alle goure sunne ...', *SEL*, also *ESEL*), *St Mark* 49 ('Bidde we nouþe seint Marc: gwas lijf we habbez i-heord to þe ende', Laud and Vernon MS only), *St John the Baptist* 21-2 ('Nou was þis a sori c ouple . and also him mote bualle / And luper prift uppon hore heued, amen seggeþ alle', *SEL*, not in *ESEL*), *St Peter* 392 ('Wy sitte ge so stille . wi ne segge ge amen', *SEL*), *St Christina* 368-9 ('To þe blisse of heuene he[o] wende . þat he[o] bogte deore inou . Wiptormens as ge habbeþ ihurd', *SEL*), *St Martin* 164 ('þo þe cou delyured was ; as ge hureþ nou', *SEL*, sim. *ESEL*, with *hou* for *nou*), *St Edmund of Canterbury* 7-8 ('Lustniez nouþe and i may telle : hou and in gwat manere / Seint Eadmund

Seint Eadmund was i-bore : gif ge it wollez i-here', *ESEL*, not in *SEL*), *St Thomas à Becket* 1-6 ('Wolle ge noupe i-here þis engliche tale: þat is here i-write ...? ... nov sone ge mouwen i-heore ...', *ESEL*, not in *SEL*), 26 ('as ge sölle ihure þat cas', *SEL*, not in *ESEL*), 201-2 ('Of is fader and of is moder : ge habbez i-heord telle, / Acke of seint thomas him-selue : þat beste cometh nou to spelle', *ESEL*, not in *SEL*).

80 The tail-rhyme *Eustace* addresses 'Alle þat louieþ Godes lore, / Olde and gonge, lasse and more' (1-2); *Meidan Maregrete* in Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 323 also addresses 'Olde ant yonge'; *Marie Maudeleyn* in MS Laud 108 begins by addressing 'Sleige men and egleche : and of redes wise and bolde' but extends this in the next line to 'wise and vnwise, gongue and olde'.

81 *Altenglische Legenden, Neue Folge*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn 1881), line 202.

82 *The Life of St Catherine by Clemence of Barking*, ed. William MacBain, *Anglo-Norman Texts XVIII* (Oxford 1964), lines 29-46.

83 *Iulien* elaborates the Latin source's brief account of Eleusius's desire for Juliana in the language of courtly love-literature; see *SJ* 5/33-8, 17/195-19/204.

84 See *Les Oeuvres de Simund de Freine*, ed. John E. Matzke, *Société des anciens texts français* (Paris 1909).

85 Edited with an English translation by J.C. Dickinson and P.T. Ricketts, 'The Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Wigmore Abbey', *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club, Herefordshire*, 39 (1969), 413-45; see also Dobson, *Origins*, p. 227.

86 See Dobson, *Origins*, pp. 299-311.

87 Corpus MS, f. 11a/22-3.

88 *Registrum Thome de Cantilupe*, translated by R.G. Griffiths, *Canterbury and York Society*, vol. 2, 1907, p. 202.

89 See Rothwell, 'The Role of French in Thirteenth-century England' (n. 7 above). Michael Richter follows up Rothwell's work in *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zum Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, vol. 18 (Stuttgart 1979); his use of Giraldus Cambrensis and the records of the 1307 statements in the canonisation procedure of Thomas Cantilupe means that his material on Herefordshire and the Welsh Marches for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is particularly extensive.

90 *SJ* 3/11.

91 E.g. *SM* 22/11-30 (Creation), *SK* 602-20 (heaven).

92 *SM* 32/4-36/24.

<sup>93</sup> *SJ* 67/722-30.

<sup>94</sup> *SK* 117-23.